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IN THE CLAIMS

Cancel claims 1-50.

Add new claims 51-80 as follows:

1-50. (Canceled)

51. (New) A method of downloading requested data via a client-server communications network which includes a server and at least one proxy server client having a local cache for storing data downloaded via the network, the method comprising:

maintaining a proxy list comprising an address for at least one proxy server client at which requested data is cached;

selecting a first address from the proxy list;

pinging a first proxy server client corresponding to the selected first address to assess a connection speed to the first proxy server client; and

downloading requested data from the local cache of the first proxy server client if the connection speed to the first proxy server client meets a predetermined criterion.

52. (New) A method according to claim 51, further comprising:

selecting a second address from the proxy list;

pinging a second proxy server client corresponding to the selected second address to assess a connection speed to the second proxy server client;

comparing the connection speed to the first proxy server client and the connection speed to the second proxy server client; and

downloading requested data from the local cache of the proxy server client with the fastest connection speed.

53. (New) A method according to claim 51, further comprising:

pinging a second proxy server client whose address is not on the proxy list to assess a connection speed to the second proxy server client; and

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downloading requested data from the local cache of the second proxy server client if the connection speed to the second proxy server client meets a target connection speed.

54. (New) A method according to claim 51, further comprising:
 - maintaining a look-up table which correlates items of data with addresses of one or more proxy server clients at which the items of data are cached;
 - assessing connection speeds to the one or more proxy server clients whose addresses are contained in the look-up table; and
 - discarding or demoting the addresses of proxy server clients having relatively slow connection speeds.
55. (New) A method according to claim 54, further comprising:
 - pinging the one or more proxy server clients whose addresses are contained in the look-up table to assess connection speeds;
 - comparing the connection speeds of the pinged proxy server clients with each other or with a target threshold speed; and
 - discarding or demoting the addresses of proxy server clients having relatively slow connection speeds or that do not meet the target threshold speed.
56. (New) A method according to claim 54, further comprising:
 - receiving cache status change reports from the one or more proxy server clients at which the items of data are cached.
57. (New) A method according to claim 51, wherein the predetermined criterion comprises a target connection speed.
58. (New) A method according to claim 51, wherein the proxy list further comprises an address of the server.

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59. (New) A method according to claim 58, further comprising:
pinging the server corresponding to the server address to assess a connection speed to the server;
comparing the connection speed to the first proxy server client and the connection speed to the server; and
downloading requested data from the local cache of the first proxy server client when the connection speed to the first proxy server client is faster than the connection speed to the server.

60. (New) A method according to claim 51, wherein the network comprises the Internet, the at least one proxy server client comprises a user terminal running a web browser, and the respective local cache is associated with the web browser on the user terminal.

61. (New) A method according to claim 51, further comprising:
storing the address of the proxy server client that provided requested data; and
assembling an address list of proxy server clients most commonly accessed to obtain requested data.

62. (New) A method according to claim 51, further comprising:
monitoring workload of one or more proxy server clients; and
contacting only proxy server clients whose workload meets a workload limit.

63. (New) A client-server communications network comprising:
a server; and
a plurality of clients connected to the server and including (i) at least one proxy server client having a local cache for storing data downloaded via the network and (ii) a requesting client having a proxy list comprising an address for at least one proxy server client at which requested data is cached, wherein the requesting client includes means for selecting an address from the proxy list, means for pinging a selected proxy server client

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corresponding to the selected address to assess a connection speed to the selected proxy server client, and means for downloading requested data from the local cache of the selected proxy server client if the connection speed to the selected proxy server client meets a predetermined criterion.

64. (New) A network according to claim 63, wherein the requesting client further includes means for recording assessed connection speeds to each selected proxy server client, means for comparing the recorded connection speeds, and means for downloading requested data from the local cache of the proxy server client with the fastest recorded connection speed.

65. (New) A network according to claim 63, wherein the predetermined criterion comprises a target connection speed.

66. (New) A network according to claim 63, wherein the requesting client further includes means for maintaining a look-up table which correlates items of data with addresses of one or more proxy server clients at which the items of data are cached, means for assessing connection speeds to the one or more proxy server clients whose addresses are contained in the look-up table, and means for discarding or demoting the addresses of proxy server clients having relatively slow connection speeds.

67. (New) A network according to claim 66, wherein the requesting client further includes means for pinging the one or more proxy server clients whose addresses are contained in the look-up table to assess connection speeds, means for comparing the connection speeds of the pinged proxy server clients with each other or with a target threshold speed, and means for discarding or demoting the addresses of proxy server clients having relatively slow connection speeds or that do not meet the target threshold speed.

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68. (New) A network according to claim 66, wherein the one or more proxy server clients include means for reporting changes in their cache status to the requesting client.

69. (New) A network according to claim 63, wherein each proxy server client includes means for preventing the proxy server client from serving requests that exceed a workload limit.

70. (New) A network according to claim 63, wherein the requesting client further includes means for monitoring workload of at least one proxy server client, and means for contacting only proxy server clients whose workload meets a workload limit.

71. (New) A network according to claim 63, wherein the network comprises the Internet, the at least one proxy server client comprises a user terminal running a web browser, and the respective local cache is associated with the browser on the user terminal.

72. (New) A client terminal comprising:

means for selecting at least one of a plurality of proxy server clients from which requested data can be downloaded;

means for pinging a selected proxy server client to assess a connection speed to the selected proxy server client; and

means for downloading requested data from the selected proxy server client if the connection speed to the selected proxy server client meets a predetermined criterion.

73. (New) A client terminal according to claim 72, wherein the means for selecting selects from a proxy list comprising respective addresses of the plurality of proxy server clients.

74. (New) A client terminal according to claim 73, further comprising means for recording assessed connection speeds to each selected proxy server clients, means for

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comparing the recorded connection speeds, and means for downloading requested data from the proxy server client with the fastest recorded connection speed.

75. (New) A client terminal according to claim 72, wherein the predetermined criterion comprises a target connection speed.

76. (New) A client terminal according to claim 73, further comprising means for maintaining a look-up table which correlates items of data with addresses of one or more proxy server clients at which the items of data are cached, means for assessing connection speeds to the one or more proxy server clients whose addresses are contained in the look-up table, and means for discarding or demoting the addresses of proxy server clients having relatively slow connection speeds.

77. (New) A client terminal according to claim 76, further comprising means for pinging the one or more proxy server clients whose addresses are contained in the look-up table to assess connection speeds, means for comparing the connection speeds of the pinged proxy server clients with each other or with a target threshold speed, and means for discarding or demoting the addresses of proxy server clients having relatively slow connection speeds or that do not meet the target threshold speed.

78. (New) A client terminal according to claim 76, further comprising means for receiving cache status change reports from the one or more proxy server clients at which the items of data are cached.

79. (New) A client terminal according to claim 72, further comprising means for monitoring workload of at least one proxy server client, and means for contacting only proxy server clients whose workload meets a workload limit.

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80. (New) A computer-readable storage medium containing a software plug-in programmed to adapt a client terminal to perform method steps comprising:

selecting at least one address from a proxy list comprising an address for at least one proxy server client;

pinging a selected proxy server client corresponding to the selected address to assess a connection speed to the selected proxy server client; and

downloading requested data from the selected proxy server client if the connection speed meets a predetermined criterion.